

IX. PARENT INVOLVEMENT

A purpose of the IDEA Amendments of 1997 is to expand and promote opportunities for parents and school personnel to work in a new partnership at the State and local levels. Parents must now have an opportunity to participate in meetings with respect to the identification, evaluation and educational placement of their child, and the provision of a free appropriate public education to their child. Parental involvement has long been recognized as an important indicator of a school's success and parent involvement has positive effects on children's attitudes and social behavior. Partnerships positively impact student achievement, improve parents' attitudes towards school and benefit school personnel as well.

Validation Planning and Data Collection

NJSDE Self-Assessment

The January 2000 NJSDE Self-Assessment Report incorporated results from several surveys that were conducted with parents to gauge the level of satisfaction and extent of participation in their child's special education program and the manner in which information was provided. The three State standards to be used by the Steering Committee regarding public agency's performance requirements for parent involvement are (1) parent involvement is advanced through training and information dissemination to parents, youth with disabilities and staff; (2) appropriate services, including transition services are received by children with disabilities when parents and youth with disabilities area actively involved; and (3) programs and services for children with disabilities are improved because parents are actively in program improvement activities. The following information reflects the issues identified by the Steering Committee regarding local IDEA implementation activities: (1) failure to provide notices and meeting invitations in languages other than English and explanation of parent rights to parents is inadequate; (2) IEPs lack information on transition planning and involvement of parent and student in the process; (3) no discussions at IEP meetings of Core Curriculum Content Standards and how children with disabilities will master the standards; (4) parents not given sufficient notice of IEP meetings; (5) full range of supports and accommodations not considered at IEP; (6) failure to discuss/consider ESY; (7) failure to provide parents with evaluation reports; (8) failure to advise of mediation, complaint procedures and due process; (9) failure to provide copy of IEP; (10) no discussion on general education classroom placement; (11) lack of formal mechanisms to involve parents in improvement initiatives; (12) parents lack of supports and training in special education decision-making process; (13) parents experience difficulty accessing training; and (14) parents unaware of existing resources.

A. AREA OF STRENGTH

Initiatives to Promote Meaningful Parent Involvement

NJSDE initiatives and/or improvements with regards to parent involvement were in response to the issues identified in its self-assessment and program monitoring activities. These initiatives include: (1) revising the parent's rights handbook (PRISE) which is translated in 10 different languages; (2) increasing parent membership and training opportunities in Learning Resource

Center networks; (3) NJSDE sponsored joint training opportunities for parents and professionals; and (4) completing parent surveys and technical assistance and information dissemination efforts to parents.

B. SUGGESTION FOR IMPROVED RESULTS

Training and Information for Parents

NJSDE should continue to foster increased involvement from parents through state initiatives such as the Learning Resource Center Network that provide resources and workshops for parents; parent involvement in the development of the New Jersey Parent Rights in Special Education (PRISE) handbook; collaboration with the New Jersey Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN) and the New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education (NJCIE) on an inclusion newsletter. Such initiatives serve to provide a user-friendly forum for ensuring parent involvement.

The State's Self-Assessment has highlighted areas in need of improvement. As local education agencies address these areas, local practices should begin to move into compliance.